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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Jorge OSELLA (Argentina)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 18 September 1992, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its forty-seventh session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 4th, 5th, 8th to 11th and 47th meetings, on 13, 14, 16, 19, 22 and 23 October and 17 December 1992. Statements and observations made in the course of the discussion of the item and replies to queries raised are reflected in the relevant summary records of the Committee (A/C.5/47/SR.4, 5, 8-11, and 47).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences (A/47/32 and Add.1); 1/

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the usefulness and feasibility of installing an appropriate signalling system whenever a speech time-limit is established in accordance with rule 72 of the rules of procedure (A/47/287);

1/ To be issued in final form as Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 32.

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the review of the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336) and comments of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions thereon (A/47/7/Add.1); 2/

(d) Letters dated 27 August, 28 August and 25 September 1992 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the President of the General Assembly (A/47/409 and Add.1 and 2);

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on the consolidated statement of scheduled special conferences for 1993 (A/C.5/47/1).

4. The report of the Secretary-General on the usefulness and feasibility of installing an appropriate signalling system whenever a speech time-limit is established in accordance with rule 72 of the rules of procedure (A/47/287) was considered under agenda item 104. That report should therefore be read in conjunction with the report of the Fifth Committee on that item.

II. CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.5/47/L.11

5. At the 47th meeting, on 17 December, following informal consultations, the coordinator of informal consultations on the item, Mr. Mahbub Kabir (Bangladesh), introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/47/L.11).

6. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/47/L.11 without a vote (see para. 8).

7. After the adoption of the draft resolution a statement was made by the representative of Belgium.

III. RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

8. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

2/ For the final text, see Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/47/7).

Pattern of conferences

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The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences, 3/

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 43/222 B of 21 December 1988 and 46/190 of 20 December 1991,

1. Approves the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1993 as submitted and amended by the Committee on Conferences; 4/

2. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1993 that may become necessary as a result of action and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session;

3. Urges all subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to seek the technical advice of the Office of Conference Services on the availability of conference-servicing facilities and resources in the process of the determination and adjustment of the dates and periodicity of their sessions in order to enhance planning and optimize utilization of conference-servicing resources;

4. Urges all United Nations organs to utilize conference-servicing resources allocated to them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner and to maximize the accuracy with which they forecast the number of fully serviced meetings;

5. Requests the Secretariat to bring the relevant General Assembly resolutions and guidelines on the use of conference-servicing resources, and information on the notional costs per hour of meeting time, to the attention of all organs;

6. Urges all subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to comply with the request of the General Assembly contained in paragraph 11 of resolution 46/190 to undertake informal consultations on a regular basis for the purpose of improving the utilization of their conference-servicing resources;

3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/47/32).

4/ Ibid., annex.

7. Renews its request contained in paragraph 12 of resolution 46/190 to the Chairmen of those subsidiary bodies to report the results of the consultations mentioned in paragraph 6 above to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and requests the Committee on Conferences to review a comprehensive analysis of replies received;

8. Urges the subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council, in the context of the required consultations mentioned in paragraph 6 above, to evaluate and report on the measures taken, including, inter alia, the convening of meetings in a timely manner, rationalizing their meeting requirements, improving the scheduling of informal consultations, the possibility of biennializing agenda items, and monitoring the timely issuance and availability of documentation;

9. Invites the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme to continue to evaluate their meeting and documentation requirements, with a view to rationalizing them, and to report on progress thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

10. Endorses the decision of the Committee on Conferences to request its Chairman to consult on its behalf with the Chairmen of organs concerned, where the utilization factor is lower than the established benchmark figure for the last three years, and requests the Committee on Conferences to report the results of such consultations to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session;

11. Decides that such consultations should be with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources and rationalizing the duration and frequency of conference-servicing time allocated, taking into account the high costs of conference servicing and the demands placed upon the Organization;

12. Welcomes the decision of the Committee on Conferences to incorporate availability and compliance indices on pre-session documentation into the experimental methodology on the utilization of conference-servicing resources;

13. Requests the Secretary-General to provide the Committee on Conferences, in addition to the utilization rate, with qualitative indicators and information about the way conference time is used in order to enable the Committee to make recommendations on conference time allocated to different bodies;

14. Requests the Committee on Conferences to finalize its analysis of the experimental methodology on the utilization of conference-servicing resources, to report on its conclusions and to submit its recommendations, as appropriate, including a revision of the benchmark figure requested in paragraph 15 of resolution 46/190, to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session;

15. Demands that all subsidiary organs of the General Assembly comply with the provisions of section I, paragraph 7, of its resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985;

16. Reaffirms that the Committee on Conferences and the Secretary-General should take account, in drawing up the calendar of conferences and meetings, of the principles contained in section I, paragraph 10, of resolution 40/243;

17. Reaffirms that United Nations bodies may hold sessions away from their established headquarters when a Government issuing an invitation for a session to be held within its territory has agreed to defray the actual additional costs directly or indirectly involved, after consultation with the Secretary-General as to their nature and possible extent;

18. Requests the Secretary-General to present a revised consolidated statement of scheduled special conferences convened under United Nations auspices towards the end of each session.

B

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions on the control and limitation of documentation, including, inter alia, resolutions 33/56 of 14 December 1978, 36/117 B of 10 December 1981, 37/14 C of 16 November 1982 and 45/238 B of 21 December 1990,

Recognizing the sovereign right of Member States to request circulation of communications as official documents,

Emphasizing the importance of timely availability of pre-session documentation,

Noting that summary records for some bodies entitled to such records have been discontinued for some time,

Taking into account section III of annex VI of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, 5/

Noting with concern that some United Nations bodies may not be able to consider agenda items for which pre-session documents are presented after those sessions have begun,

1. Renews its appeal to Member States to exercise restraint in their requests for circulation of communications and to submit such requests in the most appropriate, brief, complete, concise and timely manner possible;

5/ A/520/Rev.15 (United Nations publication, Sales No. 85.I.13).

2. Requests Member States to exercise restraint in requesting documentation and in the submission of their reports;

3. Encourages those subsidiary organs that comply with the desirable thirty-two-page limit to continue that welcome practice;

4. Urges those subsidiary organs that have been unable to comply with the desirable thirty-two-page limit, in particular those provided with summary records, to make efforts to reduce the length of future reports;

5. Encourages those bodies that receive summary records and whose reports exceed the thirty-two-page limit to consider relinquishing their entitlement to summary records;

6. Urges those bodies that receive summary records to consider relinquishing their entitlement when drafting is being undertaken in formal session and duly recorded in the report;

7. Urges the Secretary-General to take necessary measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings are distributed no less than six weeks before the meetings in all official languages, unless there is a specific decision by the body concerned regarding the timing of issuance of pre-session documentation;

8. Urges the substantive departments of the Secretariat to comply with the rule which requires them to submit pre-session documents to the Office of Conference Services at least ten weeks before the beginning of sessions, in order to permit processing in time in all official languages;

9. Requests the Secretary-General, in the context of the measures mentioned in paragraphs 7 and 8 above, to review all of the factors involved in the timely issuance of pre-session documentation, including the quality and timeliness of submission to the Office of Conference Services, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session through the Committee on Conferences;

10. Requests the Secretariat to bring to the attention of all organs and the substantive offices concerned the relevant General Assembly resolutions, rules and regulations on control and limitation of documentation, including the guidelines for drafting reports contained in General Assembly resolution 37/14 C and information on the notional cost per page of documentation;

11. Requests the Secretary-General to review current mailing lists with the aim of pruning and updating them and eliminating waste;

12. Urges subsidiary organs to review their agendas with a view to enabling the Secretariat to comply with the six-week rule, inter alia, through combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation, and requests the Secretary-General to inform the subsidiary organs of this appeal and to report orally to the Committee on Conferences on the measures taken to this effect;

13. Appeals to intergovernmental bodies to make active use of the report on the state of preparation of pre-session documentation when reviewing the organizational arrangements for substantive sessions;

14. Welcomes the decision of the Committee on Conferences to review the criteria, status and guidelines on the provision of written meeting records, and requests the Committee, taking into account the costs of conference servicing, to report thereon to the General Assembly with concrete recommendations at its forty-eighth session;

15. Requests the Secretary-General to provide summary records in a timely manner, particularly for the meetings of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, and in this regard urges him to improve the overall efficiency of conference services within existing resources;

16. Decides that, at its forty-ninth session, there shall be a comprehensive review of, inter alia, the need for, usefulness and timely issuance of verbatim and summary records, on the basis of a report by the Secretary-General through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;

17. Requests the Secretariat to issue the verbatim records of the plenary meetings of the General Assembly in final form only, on the understanding that those records would be issued promptly and that consolidated corrigenda would be issued at appropriate intervals;

18. Requests the Secretariat to pursue the possibility of issuing the verbatim records of the Security Council in a similar manner on the understanding that these records would be issued as promptly as the provisional ones are at present.

C

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the Office of Conference Services submitted in accordance with resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, 6/ which was considered by the Committee on Conferences to be a good description of the existing problems facing the Office but which lacked far-reaching proposals,

Reaffirming that the provision of appropriate, high-quality conference services to the United Nations is an essential element in the efficient functioning of the Organization,

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6/ A/47/336.

Concurring with the conclusion of the Committee on Conferences that the ultimate aim for all organizational aspects of conference servicing would be to develop further a system of global planning and coordination - in order to ensure the most cost-effective management of the meeting and documentation resources - while maintaining the requisite high quality of services,

1. Requests the Secretary-General, in the context of the above-mentioned review of the Office of Conference Services, to continue to monitor various factors affecting the performance of the Office, taking into account paragraph 100 of the report of the Committee on Conferences 3/ and the views expressed by Member States in the Fifth Committee, and to provide recommendations thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;

2. Requests the Secretary-General:

(a) To submit to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in the context of the review mentioned in paragraph 1 above, a comprehensive review taking into account the reports of external consultants and all the recommendations of the Management Advisory Service, including the cost/benefit aspects of new technologies and the financial implications of the recommendations;

(b) To undertake a follow-up to the review of the Office of Conference Services by the Management Advisory Service and to submit a report thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session;

(c) To present, if necessary, recommendations on possible restructuring of the Office of Conference Services to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;

3. Urges the Committee on Conferences to continue to explore ways and means for a more effective implementation of its terms of reference as set out in resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988 and the relevant recommendations contained in the report of the Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 7/ as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, with a view to ensuring the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources, via, inter alia, minimizing wastage and the rationalization of meeting programmes and documentation requirements.

7/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

D

The General Assembly,

Recalling all its previous resolutions on the use of languages in the United Nations,

Also recalling its resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987 on the equal treatment of all official languages of the United Nations,

Renews its request to the Secretary-General to take the necessary measures to ensure the provision of conference services as specified in its relevant resolutions and with due respect for the equal treatment of all official languages of the United Nations.